

Handout #6: Davidson's Anamolous Monism

**1. An Inconsistent Triad?**

1. **The Denial of Epiphenomenalism**: Mental events are causally efficacious.  
(For example: Feeling hungry can cause someone to search for food.)

2. **The Nomological View of Causation**: If one event *c* causes another *e*, there must be a *universal law* (or strict generalization) of which this particular causal process is an instance. It must be that *c* is an event of type *F* and *e* is an event of type *G* such that necessarily: if there is an *F* event, then there is a *G* event.

3. **The Anomalism of the Mental**: There are no universal laws holding between mental properties of types. There are no strict psychological laws and no strict psychophysical laws. If *F* is a psychological type or category then (whether *X* is a physical or psychological type) it is not the case that necessarily: if there is an *F* event, then there is a *X* event (nor is it the case that necessarily: if there is an *X* event then there is an *F* event).

Davidson does not really argue for these theses (though he does spend a lot of time trying to motivate (3)). Instead, he wants to argue that they're consistent and he wants to explain (and endorse) the view of the mind/brain relation that results when one adopts all three.

**2. Token-Event Identity**: Denying Kim's View Kim's extensional (semantic) definition: 'Fa' and 'Gb' pick out the same event iff 'a' and 'b' denote the same object and 'F' and 'G' express the same property.

On Davidson's account this isn't right: even if 'F' and 'G' express different properties, descriptions involving the two predicates can pick out the same event.

The death of Scott=the death of the author of Waverly.

The assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand=the event that started WWI.

The eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79=the cause of the destruction of Pompei.

Being Scott≠being the author of Waverly; being an assassination of AF≠being the start of WWI;  
being an eruption≠being destroyed.

**3. Davidson's Reconciliation of (1)-(3)**

(a) **True**: My thinking of a plate of spaghetti on May 6, 2008 at 10:00PM=neurons in my brain firing in pattern P on May 6, 2008 at 10:00PM.

(b) **False**: Thinking of a plate of spaghetti=having a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P.

(c) **False**: Necessarily, for all *x*: If *x* is thinking of a plate of spaghetti, then *x* has a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P.

However, suppose my thinking of a plate of spaghetti *causes me* to intentionally leave bed to make myself one. Then according to the Nomological View of Causality there must be some strict law of which this is an instance. Now my bodily behavior of getting out of bed would be

described by a physicist as an event involving various objects moving along trajectories with velocities, etc. So Davidson would say:

(d) **True:** AZ's getting out of bed on May 6, 2008 at 10:01PM=body b moving with velocity v along trajectory t (etc.) on May 6, 2008 at 10:01PM. Thus, it must also be:

(e) **True:** Necessarily and for all x if x has a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P, then x moves with velocity v along trajectory t (etc.).

#### 4. Supervenience & Causation

**Question 1:** Davidson embraces a mental/physical event-identity thesis. But does Davidson's view amount to property dualism? He says "no."

**Argument:** The account embraces the supervenience of the mental on the physical:

Weak Supervenience 1: Properties P1-Pn supervene on properties G1-Gn if there can be no change in which things have the Ps unless there is a change in which things have the Gs.

Weak Supervenience 2: Properties P1-Pn supervene on properties G1-Gn if there can't be two objects entirely alike in terms of Gs but differing in terms of Ps.

*Response:* Is supervenience sufficient for physicalism? Does it rule out property dualism?

**Question 2:** Does the denial of psychophysical laws and the acceptance of a nomological view of causation lead to epiphenomenalism? Davidson says "no."

**Argument:** Causation is a relation in extension between events. "Laws are linguistic; and so events can instantiate laws, and hence be explained or predicted in light of laws, only as those events are described in one or another way. The principle of causal interaction deals with events in extension and is therefore blind to the mental-physical dichotomy."

*Response:* John is stronger than Bill. John is stronger than Bill in virtue of having certain properties that Bill lacks. Event c caused event e. Event c caused event e in virtue of having certain properties and not others. On Davidson's account mental events cause physical events in virtue of their physical properties, not their mental properties. So the view implies epiphenomenalism.

#### 5. Motivating the Denial of Psychophysical Laws

##### a. The Holism of the Mental

1. The Indeterminacy of Intentional Attribution
2. Rationality as a "Constitutive" Principle of Intentional Explanation

##### b. Grue and Green: Emerires and Emeralds

'Grue': x is grue iff x is green if observed at some  $t \leq$  January 1, 2008 or blue and observed after t.

'emerire': x is an emerire iff x is an emerald and observed at some  $t \leq$  January 1, 2008 or a sapphire and observed after t.

Let E1=emerald 1 looks green.

Let E1000=emerald 1000 looks green.

Suppose one learns the truth of E1-E1000 through observation. Intuitively this provides one with good evidence for believing H=All emeralds are green, and it does not provide one with good evidence for believing H1=All emeralds are grue. (Indeed, H is incompatible with H1.) But in observing the truth of E1-E1000 one has made the very observations one would make were these 1000 emeralds grue. So it seems as though E1-E1000 do provide one with good evidence to believe H1. (Suppose one has the concept of something's being grue. In having observed that emerald 1 looks green has one observed that emerald 1 looks grue?)

**Davidson claims:** 'Grue' and 'emerald' are not *well-suited* to one another, but 'grue' and 'emerires' are. 'All emerires are grue' is well-confirmed by observing E1-E1000. 'Believes that grass is green' and 'exhibits neuronal firing pattern P' are not well-suited to each other.